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## Just In

### Healthy Lifestyle May Reduce Alzheimer's Risk

**H**ealthy diet, regular physical activity, no smoking, and moderate alcohol consumption are associated with a lower risk of Alzheimer's disease—even those at high genetic risk for dementia—than those with an unhealthy lifestyle, according to researchers in the U.K. The study included over 196,000 participants of European ancestry, at least 60 years old, and without dementia at the start of the study. Those at high genetic risk for dementia who followed a healthy lifestyle were 32 percent less likely to develop dementia than those at high risk who followed an unhealthy lifestyle. Healthy lifestyle reduced risk for dementia across all genetic risk groups. Healthy diet aligned with the Mediterranean and MIND diets. [EN](#)

*JAMA*, July 2019

## Trying to Lose Weight? Less May Be More

*Why losing even 3% of your body weight may have benefits.*

**T**he media may portray washboard abs as the very picture of health—for both men and women—but the surprising truth is that it takes a lot less weight loss than you think to see an improvement in health. In fact, many researchers and health experts say that losing three percent of your body weight is enough to bring significant health benefits.

**Behaviors vs. Outcomes** How can such a small amount of weight loss improve health? It may be because of the *behaviors* that lead to the weight loss, such as eating better and increasing physical activity. Research has found that individuals who start exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet—and sustain those changes—often see significant health benefits with a weight loss of less than three percent, or even with no weight loss.

For example, in the Diabetes Prevention Study, participants who increased their amount of physical activity by about 150 minutes per week were 44 percent less likely to develop diabetes, even though they didn't achieve “clinically significant” weight loss. This may be because physical activity is an effective way to reduce excess visceral fat—fat located in and around your abdominal organs—and increase muscle mass, both of which are associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

In 2013, an expert panel formed by the National Institutes of Health concluded that as little as three percent weight loss could improve blood sugar and triglycerides, while five percent may be necessary to improve blood pressure and cholesterol. However, they were talking about weight loss alone, not necessarily changes in nutrition and physical activity.

**Health vs. Appearance.** While it's good news that a small weight loss can have a



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*Even a small amount of weight loss can impact overall measures of health.*

positive health effect, it may not feel like good news if appearance is one of your major reasons for losing weight. Research shows that when someone's expectations of how much weight they will lose is far more than they actually lose, they are likely to abandon their efforts. A 2018 study found that women whose primary motivation for losing weight was appearance were more likely to *gain* weight over the 30 months of the study.

Something else to consider: if someone is being teased or discriminated against because of their weight, going from 300 pounds to 291 pounds is probably not going to change that, sadly.

**Shift Your Thinking.** For years, the most common recommendation for “clinically significant” weight loss was 5 to 10 percent. A 2016 editorial in the journal *Obesity* said that unfortunately, most doctors will likely stick to the idea that their patients who have BMIs in the “obese” range need to achieve at least a five percent weight loss. Why unfortunate? Because that level of weight loss may not be achievable—or if it is, it is likely to be unsustainable—and when people try and fail to lose weight or to keep it off, the resulting frustration makes it very easy to abandon the very nutrition and physical activity habits that in and of themselves improve health. [EN](#)

—Carrie Dennett, MPH, RDN



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## Ask the EN Experts

A lot of people have questions about what they can do to improve their diets (and by default, their health as well). There are countless tips and suggestions from dietitians, doctors, and other health professionals but one that I feel many of us would agree on is to increase your amount of fruits and vegetables each day. Don't "take away" any foods yet. Instead, aim to fill at least half of your plate at



### FRUITS

- One medium fruit = size of your fist
- Fresh, frozen, or canned = ½ cup
- Fruit juice = ¼ cup
- Dried fruit = ¼ cup

### VEGETABLES

- Raw, leafy vegetable = 1 cup
- Fresh, frozen, or canned = ½ cup
- Vegetable juice = ½ cup

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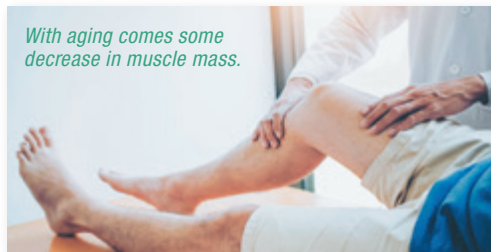
*Aim to fill half of your plate with fruits and veggies.*

breakfast, lunch, and dinner with fruits and vegetables... the more brightly colored, the better. A goal to aim for (and to work up to, gradually, if needed) is to incorporate four servings of fruit per day and five servings of vegetables per day. [EN](#)  
—Kristen N. Smith, PhD, RDN, EN Editor

## What is Sarcopenia? Garlic and Blood Pressure?

**Q** I keep hearing about sarcopenia—what is it?

**A** From birth until around age 30, our muscles grow and increase in strength. However, at some point in our 30s, muscle mass begins to decrease and function is affected—this is known as sarcopenia (a condition associated with the aging process and involves



*With aging comes some decrease in muscle mass.*

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a gradual and consistent loss of muscle mass and strength). A person who is physically inactive may lose as much as three to five percent of their muscle mass each decade after turning 30, however, even active people will still experience some muscle loss. As these physical changes take place, a person's balance may be affected, as well as their gait (increasing risk of falls), and the ability to perform typical daily activities. At this point, there is no specific test to diagnose sarcopenia, but there are a few steps that may be taken to help slow this process. The main treatment is regular exercise—specifically, strength training or resistance training (which can be done using weights or resistance bands). Talk with your doctor about other treatment options if you feel that you may be experiencing symptoms of sarcopenia. [EN](#)

—Kristen N. Smith, PhD, RDN

**Q** Does garlic help lower blood pressure?

**A** Garlic has been used as a natural remedy for many chronic conditions—it is naturally antibacterial and antifungal, it may help reduce cholesterol, acts as a blood thinner, and helps to boost immunity due to its antioxidant properties, among many other benefits. Of interest though, is garlic's ability to help reduce blood pressure. Allicin (one of the most beneficial high blood pressure remedies) is found in garlic. A study by researchers from the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences noted that taking a 600 mg time-released garlic tablet reduced blood pressure levels in men with mild to moderate high blood pressure. How does it work? The body increases production of a compound called angiotensin 1-converting enzyme, or "ACE" and as a result, blood pressure increases. Garlic contains gamma-glutamylcysteine, a natural ACE inhibitor. In short, garlic contains compounds that may help neutralize ACE and it is this action, coupled with the high allicin content that allows garlic to dilate (or widen) the arteries, resulting in a reduction in blood pressure. Before incorporating garlic supplements into your day, be sure to discuss it with your doctor. [EN](#)

—Kristen N. Smith, PhD, RDN



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*Garlic does more than add flavor to dishes.*

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## Benefits of Kimchi

*Kimchi, a traditional mix of fermented vegetables (and a staple of Korean cuisine) has many health benefits.*

If you're a fan of Korean cuisine, you might already be familiar with kimchi, a mixture of salted and fermented vegetables, because it has been a staple for centuries. But, if it's your first time reading about it, you'll be glad to discover that kimchi benefits apply not only to those at risk for heart disease and diabetes, but also for those looking to manage their weight, improve digestion, promote skin health, and more.

**Kimchi is a Nutritious Vegetable Probiotic Food.** Kimchi is a low-calorie, low-fat, nutrient-dense source of vitamins (especially vitamin C and beta-carotene), minerals, fiber, important phytochemicals (including beta-sitosterol, sulfur compounds, and capsaicin), and perhaps most importantly, numerous probiotic strains (including *Lactobacillus plantarum* and *Lactobacillus brevis*). Researchers have compared kimchi to yogurt, stating that kimchi can be considered a vegetable

probiotic food, while yogurt is a health-promoting dairy probiotic food.

**Kimchi Benefits for Weight Loss.** Studies have reported numerous health benefits of kimchi and other fermented vegetables. For instance, eating kimchi can help obese people decrease body weight, body mass index, waist-hip ratio, and percentage of body fat.

Kimchi benefits also improve a number of metabolic factors associated with being overweight that increase your risk of heart disease and diabetes: fasting blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure. In diabetic rats, kimchi improves insulin function and lowers average blood glucose levels. In healthy young people, kimchi helps lower cholesterol and blood sugar.

**Other Kimchi Benefits.** Besides its effect on weight, cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar, kimchi benefits that have been reported in the scientific



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*Kimchi provides flavor and health benefits.*

literature (but may also benefit from additional research) include:

- ▶ Increased antioxidant status
- ▶ Protection from asthma
- ▶ Anti-aging properties
- ▶ Anti-cancer benefit
- ▶ Protection from atherosclerosis
- ▶ Anti-constipation effects
- ▶ Colon health promotion
- ▶ Brain health promotion
- ▶ Skin health promotion
- ▶ Immune system stimulation

**Utilizing Kimchi Benefits.** There are hundreds of varieties of kimchi, each with varying types of fermented vegetables, seasonings, and cooking methods. Tastes range from bland to very spicy. Good kimchi is often described as having a balanced sour, salty, and spicy flavor, and has a crunchy texture. Experiment to find brands and varieties that suit your taste, but make sure you're purchasing fermented kimchi, as opposed to non-fermented varieties. Also, avoid kimchi that contains excessive amounts of sodium, and/or preservatives by making your own. [EN](#)

—Kristen N. Smith, PhD, RDN

(adapted from [www.universityhealthnews.com](http://www.universityhealthnews.com))

## Spotlight on Supplements: Moringa

*Moringa is being studied as an important antioxidant.*

Moringa (*Moringa Oleifera*), also called "horseradish tree," is native to the sub-Himalayan areas of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan and is now widely cultivated in the tropics. The leaves and seeds are the most utilized parts of the tree, and have been consumed by humans for thousands of years. The leaves and seed pods are packed with protein, calcium, iron, vitamin C, and potassium. In fact, studies have reported that, gram-for-gram, moringa leaves provide more than seven times the vitamin C found in oranges, 17 times the calcium found in milk, 15 times the potassium found in bananas, and 25 times the iron found in spinach. Moringa is also known for its phytochemical content—including glucosinolates, which have been found to provide cancer-fighting properties. In addition to its nutrient density profile, moringa is easily cultivated, making it a sustainable remedy for malnutrition. It is used in India and

Africa in feeding programs to offer nourishment and to combat hunger.

Moringa is reputed to provide medicinal benefits for various conditions. Because of the numerous health claims of moringa, some have called it the "miracle tree." A 2018 review reported moringa to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidative properties. Preliminary evidence suggests moringa consumption may reduce the severity of asthma symptoms. Studies also report moringa may help improve fasting glucose and postprandial blood glucose levels, blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels in individuals with diabetes. Additional findings have shown moringa consumption in lactating women may help milk production. Although there is growing peer-reviewed biomedical evidence to support the health properties of moringa, there is insufficient data to currently support these claims. Additional research is needed.



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*Moringa contains high levels of vitamins and minerals.*

Consuming moringa leaves, fruit and seeds is considered safe. However, moringa root may be unsafe. The root contains spirochin, a potentially toxic alkaloid and may result in harm. Although it has not been studied in humans, animal data shows that the root can cause nerve paralysis. Sourcing moringa from reputable suppliers that offer products containing 100 percent moringa, grown in soil not containing high amounts of heavy metals or toxins, is important to ensure safety. In the United States, moringa is most commonly found in powder or capsule form that is made from its leaves. It is often added to juice and smoothies, or added to food products like energy bars. [EN](#)

—Kaley Todd, MS, RDN



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# How Can an Overweight Person Be Frail?

Answer...the obesity paradox.

A common perception of an elderly person might be one who is thin, weak, and frail. But with the escalation in obesity, we are actually seeing a steep rise in frail older adults who are at high body weights. Over one-third of adults ages 65-80 are overweight or obese contributing to chronic health issues such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, depression, cancer, and urinary incontinence. In addition, obesity can intensify an age-related decline in physical function leading to frailty and an impaired quality of life.

A decrease in activity from chronic conditions and aging leads to fat accumulation and fat redistribution. This is coupled with the slow steady loss of muscle as we age. Despite a greater absolute muscle mass, older adults with obesity have low muscle mass relative to their body weight. This condition is known as sarcopenic obesity.

Sarcopenia (also discussed on page 2) is the loss of muscle tissue and strength associated with the aging process. Sarcopenic obesity is a convergence of two epidemics—an aging population and rising obesity rates.

As aging progresses and if mobility becomes more difficult due to health issues, a vicious cycle occurs leading to less and less activity and the loss of function to perform even the most basic activities of daily living.

**Identify Frailty Early.** Talk with your doctor if you experience more than one of these criteria:

- ▶ You feel weak, have trouble standing without assistance, or have reduced hand grip strength.
- ▶ You feel tired and have trouble getting going three or more days a week.
- ▶ Your activity level is low, affecting your ability to do household chores or formal exercise.
- ▶ Your walking pace has slowed considerably.

### Can Older Adults Attempt Weight Loss?

Recent studies have shown that it is safe for older adults to lose weight. The most effective method is one that includes both modest caloric restriction and increased physical activity. Talk with your doctor or a registered dietitian about a weight management program that is right for you.

### What You Can Do to Stay Vital

- ▶ Manage chronic health conditions like high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes.
- ▶ Be active most days of the week. Besides intentional physical activity, incorporate lifestyle activity like parking at the end of the parking lot and walking or biking to do errands.
- ▶ To maintain muscle mass include resistance training two or three times a week.

- ▶ To help prevent falls include balance exercises at least two times a week.
- ▶ Stay connected. People who volunteer in the community and maintain active friendships have a lower risk of frailty.
- ▶ Follow a Mediterranean-style diet of veggies, fruits, lean proteins, beans, nuts and seeds, healthy fats like olive oil, whole grains, and low-fat dairy.
- ▶ Aim for half your weight (pounds) in protein (grams). Example—a 160 pound person would need about 80 grams of protein a day, preferably spread throughout the day. For a 160-pound woman, that would mean consuming about 20 grams of protein at breakfast, 25 grams at lunch, 25 grams at dinner, and 10 grams for a snack. See the Protein Content table below for ideas and portions.
- ▶ Easy rule of thumb: each of these contains about 7 grams of protein
  - 1 ounce of fish, chicken, or red meat (beef, lamb, pork)
  - 1 cup of milk or soy milk
  - 1 egg
  - ½ cup cooked dried beans
- ▶ Foods containing an amino acid called leucine help stimulate muscle protein synthesis. Including leucine-rich foods (shown in the table below) at each meal may help reduce age-related muscle loss. [EN](#)

—Sharon Lehrman, MPH, RDN

## Protein Content of Common Foods

FOOD	PROTEIN (GRAMS)	FOOD	PROTEIN (GRAMS)
1 cup chicken, cooked	43	3 tablespoons 100% whey protein powder	12
1 cup turkey, cooked	41	1 cup flavored yogurt	10
1 cup cottage cheese	32	1 veggie patty	10
1 cup canned soybeans	29	1 cup milk	8
3 ounces roasted beef or pork	26	8 ounces canned green peas	8
3 ounces fish, cooked	25	½ cup cooked edamame	8
3 ounces ground beef, cooked	22	¼ cup pumpkin seeds	8
1 cup plain Greek style yogurt	22	1 cup soy milk	7
4 ounces tempeh	21	1 ounce cheddar cheese	7
3 egg whites	21	1 ounce nuts	7
3 ounces ham, cooked	18	1 large egg	7
1 cup lentils	18	6 ounces soy yogurt	7
4 ounces firm tofu	18	1 cup oatmeal, bulgur, rice, or quinoa, cooked	6
1 cup soy nuts	17	2 scoops (25 grams) pea protein powder	6
1 cup canned beans	15	1 tablespoon peanut butter	4
¼ cup roasted soy nuts	15	1 tablespoon almond butter	2
1 cup plain yogurt	12		
1 cup egg substitute	12		

## Leucine Content of Common Foods

FOOD	WEIGHT (GRAMS)	PORTION / SERVING	CALORIES	LEUCINE (GRAMS)
Cheese, cheddar	19	1 slice	78	0.462
Cheese, cottage, 1% milkfat	113	½ cup	81	1.440
Cheese, cottage, 2% milkfat	113	½ cup	92	1.185
Cheese, Swiss	28	1 slice	110	0.831
Egg, whole, raw, fresh	50	1 large	72	0.543
Milk, lowfat, fluid, 1% milkfat	244	1 cup	102	0.778
Milk, nonfat, fluid (fat-free or skim)	245	1 cup	83	0.782
Yogurt, Greek, plain, low fat	200	1 container (7 oz)	146	1.058
Yogurt, plain, low fat	170	1 container (6 oz)	107	0.899
Beef, loin, tenderloin roast	85	3 oz	156	2.001
Chicken, breast, grilled	85	3 oz	128	2.148
Pork, fresh, loin, sirloin, roasted	85	3 oz	196	1.929
Soybeans, cooked	43	¼ cup	74	0.582
Soymilk, fortified	243	1 cup	104	0.260



Shoppers Guide

# Meal Starters and Simmer Sauces

Cooking from scratch is a great way to have complete control over what you're feeding your family, but some nights that's just not in the cards. It takes time that you don't always have to shop for ingredients as well as to wash, chop, and measure.



Simmer sauces equal quick meals.

Fortunately, several companies are helping consumers create "semi-home-cooked" meals. The idea is simple—they gather all the spices or liquids, and sometimes even the grain in one package. Simply chop up your protein and cook it all together in one pot. The protein component of a meal can contribute a substantial amount of fat and calories, therefore, by controlling the type and amount of protein you choose, you can positively impact the total fat and calories in your meal.

Another area of concern with many premade foods is the sodium content. Thankfully, some of these meal helpers are fairly low in sodium but pay attention to the ingredients you're adding to be sure that the meal still fits in your sodium-conscious eating plan.

**Helpful Hints.** When you need help getting dinner on the table, keep the following tips in mind.

- ▶ **Protein Power.** Often, the directions may call for a specific type of protein. However, since you have the final decision, you can choose leaner options like skinless chicken breast, shrimp, or tofu.
- ▶ **Veggie Time.** Some of these kits suggest the addition of extra veggies. But, even for those that don't, it's a great opportunity to boost veggie intake. When you make a meal, add steamed, frozen, or even leftover vegetables.
- ▶ **Great Grains.** While most meal starter kits include a grain, the simmer sauces don't. To round out the meal, consider serving it with a whole grain source such as brown rice, whole grain pasta, or quinoa.

—Heidi McIndoo, MS, RD

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## Grocery Store Meal Starters/Simmer Sauces Nutritional Comparison

✓ = EN's Picks. As with all EN comparisons, this is only a sampling of products. Meal starter picks contain no more than 180 calories (11% DV), 4 g fat (5% DV), and 450 mg sodium (20% DV). Sauce pics contain no more than 60 calories (3% DV), 4 g fat (5% DV), and 450 mg sodium (20% DV).

MEAL STARTERS*	Calories	Total Fat (g)	Sat Fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)	Protein (g)
Velveeta Skillet Creamy Beef Stroganoff	200	8	2.5	28	760	1	4	8
Velveeta Skillet Ultimate Cheeseburger Mac	220	9	2.5	27	870	1	5	8
✓ Tuna Helper Tuna Cheesy Pasta	110	1	0	21	410	<1	2	4
✓ Hamburger Helper Cheesy Fajita	110	0.5	0	23	450	<1	1	2
✓ Hamburger Helper Stroganoff	110	1	0	23	440	<1	2	3
Hamburger Helper Lasagna	130	1	0	27	550	1	5	3
✓ Food Network Kitchen Inspirations Shrimp Scampi	150	1.5	0.5	28	300	2	3	6
Food Network Kitchen Inspirations Spicy Szechuan Style Chicken and Rice	200	0	0	43	290	3	8	4
Food Network Kitchen Inspirations Chicken Tikka Masala	200	0.5	0	44	460	4	9	5
✓ Knorr One Skillet Meals Rustic Italian White Bean With Farro Meal Starter	180	3	1.5	32	450	3	2	6
Knorr One Skillet Meals Shrimp Scampi Whole Wheat Couscous Meal Starter	200	6	2.5	33	410	4	1	6
SIMMER SAUCES**								
✓ Saffron Road Korean Stir Fry Simmer Sauce, GF	60	1.5	0	12	350	1	9	1
✓ Saffron Road Thai Red Curry Simmer Sauce, GF	20	1	1	3	160	3	<1	<1
✓ Saffron Road Coconut Curry Korma Sauce, GF	35	2	1.5	4	125	0	3	0
Saffron Road Pad Thai Simmer Sauce	70	2.5	0	11	370	1	7	1
✓ Saffron Road Pad Thai Mango Simmer Sauce, GF	20	0	0	5	120	0	4	0
✓ Saffron Road Lemongrass Basil Simmer Sauce, GF	60	3.5	3	8	220	1	4	1
Sharwood's Tikka Masala Cooking Sauce	160	11	7	14	420	2	8	3
Sharwood's Korma Cooking Sauce	150	12	9	15	380	2	10	2
Maya Kaimal Tikka Masala Simmer Sauce, GF	170	14	4.5	11	580	1	8	2
Maya Kaimal Butter Masala Simmer Sauce, GF	110	9	4	7	400	1	4	2
Maya Kaimal Kashmiri Curry Simmer Sauce, GF	100	11	4	9	630	1	6	2
Masala Mama Vindaloo Simmer Sauce	80	5	0	10	500	2	3	2
Masala Mama Tikka Masala Simmer Sauce	140	11	6	9	430	2	4	2
Masala Mama Coconut Curry Simmer Sauce	110	8	3.5	9	230	2	3	1
Yai's Thai Green Thai Coconut Curry, GF	160	14	9	6	135	1	3	2
Yai's Thai Yellow Coconut Curry, GF	160	14	9	7	135	1	3	2
Trader Joe's Masala Simmer Sauce	90	5	1.5	11	450	1	9	2
Trader Joe's Thai Green Curry Simmer Sauce	190	16	8	11	470	1	8	1
✓ Frontera Chicken Taco Skillet Sauce, GF	20	0.5	0	3	200	10	2	10
✓ Frontera Veggie Taco Skillet Sauce	5	0	0	1	110	0	<1	0
Frontera Texas Chili Starter	70	1	0	13	690	2	4	3
✓ Simply Organic Southwest Taco Simmer Sauce	15	0	0	3	200	0	1	0
Campbell's Sauces Oven, Cheesy Broccoli Chicken	60	4	2	3	610	0	0	2
Campbell's Sauces Oven, Chicken Pot Pie	60	4	1.5	4	640	0	<1	1
Campbell's Sauces Slow Cooker, Tavern Style Pot Roast	50	2.5	1.5	7	580	0	3	0
Campbell's Sauces Slow Cooker, Apple Bourbon Pulled Pork	60	0	0	15	480	0	12	0
✓ Campbell's Sauces Skillet, Shrimp Scampi	50	4	2	3	420	0	1	0
Campbell's Sauces Skillet, Thai Curry Chicken	70	3.5	1	8	420	1	6	1
✓ Campbell's Sauces Skillet, Sesame Chicken	40	0	0	9	330	0	7	1

Note: g=gram, mg=milligram, sat fat=saturated fat, carb=carbohydrates, DV=Daily Value, GF=Gluten Free. Daily requirement based on 2,000 calorie/day diet. Source: food labels \*Nutritionals are for starter kit/simmer sauces only, without additional ingredients. \*\* Nutritionals are for serving sizes based on number of servings per package which vary from 2.5 to 8 per package.

# The Science Behind Snacking

Read on to learn more about our snacking patterns.

The traditional three-square meals a day eating pattern has given way to lots of noshing. In fact, 50 percent of all eating occasions are snacks. And it's not just millennials and young adults who are eating between meals. Even 43 percent of baby boomers say they can't get through a day without a snack. All of this snacking provides about one-quarter of our daily calorie intake.

There are many reasons for the increase in snacking and the decrease in traditional meals, says Shelley Balanko, PhD, senior vice president of the Hartman Group, Inc, a food culture consultancy. Not only is food available at every type of gathering or on the way to run any errand, but there's increased variety available too, making self-restraint much harder, she explains. Time constraints are eating into traditional meals, as well. Younger adults struggle to balance work and family demands, and with more time on their hands, retired folks are often on the go. The decline in meal planning and cooking skills has shifted the balance of meals and snacks too. So have the interests in better nutrition and experimenting with new flavors. About 30 percent of consumers snack as an opportunity to try out new flavors, including ethnic foods. And just over half of all snacking occasions are aimed at better nutrition such as an opportunity to get more fruits and vegetables, says Balanko. Unfortunately, she adds, 22 percent of all snacking is aimless, such as snacking because of boredom or to cope with stress.

## Make Snacks Work for You

**Become a planner.** According to research involving over 2,700 adults and published in a 2014 issue of the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, consumers eat 59 percent of their snacks without planning. Yet typically, planning leads to better choices. Some people find it helpful to create a list of suitable snacks and to choose from that list only.

**Fill in nutritional gaps.** Think about what's missing from your meals. Are



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Snacks can be a healthy part of an eating plan.

you eating enough protein, sufficient fiber, adequate dairy, ample fruits and vegetables? Examine each food group or nutrient of concern, and make an informed decision about what your body needs at snack time.

**Avoid aimless snacking.** With more than one-fifth of snacks serving no good purpose, it's smart to pay attention to your habits as well as emotional cues that might lead you to pointless, and potentially harmful, eating. There are more productive strategies than eating to deal with boredom and unpleasant emotions. Try some of these or create your own list.

- ▶ Play with your pet
- ▶ Chat with a friend
- ▶ Listen to uplifting music
- ▶ Take a walk or simply spend time outside
- ▶ Sit quietly with a cup of soothing tea
- ▶ Practice your hobby such as painting or photography
- ▶ Spend time in yoga, meditation or prayer

## Good Snack Options

Since fruits and vegetables are very much under-consumed, set the goal to eat a fruit and/or vegetable at every snack. If you're short on other foods or nutrients, pair your fruit or vegetable

with another nutritious option. Here are some choices that may work for you for different circumstances.

**More protein:** To build or maintain muscle mass, you'll need a good source of protein several times per day. Try low-fat cottage cheese with berries or sardines atop whole grain crackers and tomatoes.

**More fiber:** Fiber does more than keep your bowels regular. Some types of fiber help with blood sugar and blood cholesterol control. Some help you manage your appetite, and others feed the good bacteria in your gut. Enjoy a pear and a few almonds or some popcorn and raisins.

**More beans and lentils:** Pulses like beans and lentils are a treasure trove of nutrition, including protein, fiber, and blood pressure-friendly potassium. Dip raw veggies in hummus or black bean dip or snack on roasted chickpeas and baby carrots.

**More whole grains:** Eating whole grains is linked to good heart health and less risk for type 2 diabetes. Spread peanut butter and sliced bananas on whole wheat toast. Sit down to a small bowl of oatmeal with diced apples and cinnamon.

**More fruit and vegetables:** There's a whole world out there! Enjoy any favorite fruit or vegetable during a snack.

**More dairy:** Dairy gives us both protein and calcium. Sprinkle nuts and fruit over low-fat Greek yogurt, dip veggies into a yogurt-based dip, or enjoy low-fat cheese with apple slices.

**When you don't want a full meal:** Sit down to a mini meal containing two or three food groups. Aim to include at least one good source of protein. Try a small cup of black bean soup, a couple of whole grain crackers and a few grapes. Melt reduced-fat cheese on a whole wheat tortilla, and top with jarred tomato salsa.

**Something sweet:** Dip strawberries, orange segments or any favorite fruit into melted chocolate.

**Something crunchy:** Snack on nuts, popcorn, or roasted chickpeas. Pair them with fresh or dried fruit. Fill a few stalks of celery with almond or peanut butter and top them with raisins or dried cranberries. 

—Jill Weisenberger, MS, RDN

# The Macro Shuffle

*A look at the recent dieting trend of counting macronutrients.*

Many nutrition professionals including dietitians have a good idea what macronutrient breakdown most people should be aiming for. This target as a percentage of total daily calories would be 45 to 60 percent carbohydrates, 15 to 25 percent protein and 20 to 35 percent fat. But in recent years as a raft of specialized diets like keto and carb cycling have gained momentum, more people have been adjusting these ratios to what they believe better aligns with their desired goals like weight loss. Which begs the question: Are macros worth messing around with or should we be sticking with established guidelines?

So, what are macronutrients exactly? “They are carbohydrates, proteins and fats that the body requires in large amounts for growth and development,” says Lisa R. Young, PhD, RDN, author of “Finally Full, Finally Slim.” In fact, “macro” is a Greek word that means “large”. Each gram of carbohydrate and protein contains roughly four energy calories, while a gram of fat provides nine calories. What is not a macronutrient?

“Vitamins and minerals are micronutrients since they are required in smaller amounts,” Young explains.

A macro-centric diet shifts the focus from total calories to the ratios of carbs, proteins, and fats consumed, and, in turn, places more importance on where calories are hailing from. This can vary greatly depending on what diet plan an individual is latching onto. For instance, those adhering to a keto diet may glean 60 to 80 percent of their calories from fat and as little as 5 to 10 percent from carbohydrates, which is a big contrast from standard nutrition advice. The protein-forward Paleo diet can bring

the percentage of daily calories from protein up to 30 percent or more. An endurance athlete may amp up their carb intake to the point where it reaches as much as 70 percent of overall calories. And with the diet known as carb-cycling, people will adjust their carb intake throughout a week or month to include low (5 to 10 percent), medium (40 percent) and high (60 percent) carb days.

What’s up with all this playing around with macro numbers? It all comes down to adjusting macros for



*There are three main macronutrients—carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.*

a targeted purpose, be it weight loss or improved athletic performance. An individual looking to put on extra lean body mass may choose a bigger piece of chicken to bump up what percentage of calories they get from protein. Those on fat-forward keto believe focusing on dietary fats instead of carbs makes the body more efficient at burning fat, reduces appetite and does a better job at trimming the waistline. “A lot of this comes down to people following current dieting trends,” Young says. While there is plenty of anecdotal evidence floating around social media regarding the success of certain macro ratios, for the most part we lack long-term studies to gauge what impact big swings in

macronutrients can have on our health and weight loss efforts.

“It’s important to remember that drastic changes to macronutrient intake are hard for most people to sustain long-term,” notes Young. She adds that the established macro guidelines are what most people go back to because they are easier to follow and provide more flexibility. The concern when people regularly alter their macro intakes is that it can lead to frequent weight fluctuations and recent research shows that the stress on the body from this can raise the risk for early death. And in the battle of the bulge, what you eat is just as important as where your macros are hailing from. A recent

study in the journal JAMA found that people lost about the same amount of weight over a one-year-period on a low-fat, higher-carb diet as on a diet with a macro ratio skewed more towards fat than carbs as long as the diets were focused on whole foods instead of processed ones.

The tricky thing about macronutrients is that the amount of each you should be eating can vary drastically from person to person.

For instance, a sedentary individual will likely require a macro ratio that isn’t as strongly skewed towards carbs as does a full-time endurance athlete. Some can thrive on obtaining a higher percentage of calories from protein while others will always feel beaten down by this dieting strategy. For this reason, it is a good idea to meet with a registered dietitian to suss out what macro adjustments work best for you and will be sustainable over the long-haul. “And it’s always a good idea to ease into macro shifts slowly,” adds Young. Expect a bit of trial and error as you’re tweaking macros. As of now, there is no right answer on what your macros should look like. [EN](#)

—Matthew Kadey, MS, RD

# How Sweet (Potato) It Is!

**The Folklore.** Sweet potato or yam? Chances are it's a sweet potato. These tubers (*Ipomoea batatas*) are not related to the yam (*Dioscoreae alata*), a rough and starchy root vegetable. When the now familiar orange-fleshed sweet potato first arrived in the U.S., people knew only the white fleshed variety, so producers called the newcomer “yams,” from the African word for sweet potato “nyami” to distinguish one from the other. This Central and South American sweetie has been traced back 10,000 years in Peruvian caves. A sweet potato by any other name is still a rich source of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory nutrients, most notably, beta carotene.

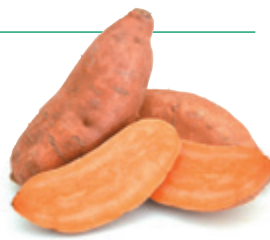
**The Facts.** The sweet potato, a member of the morning glory family of plants, is not related to the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), providing its own unique flavor and nutritional punch. Common varieties like Garnet or Japanese Purple have different textures (firm and dry or soft and moist) and degrees of sweetness. One medium sweet potato has 103 calories, yet packs 438 percent DV (DV=Daily Value, based on 2,000 calories/day) of vision protecting vitamin A, 37 percent DV of antioxidant vitamin C, and the powerful, health-promoting compounds, beta carotene and anthocyanins, giving yellow/orange and purple potatoes their color.

**The Findings.** The sweet potato ranked number one among all vegetables from a dietary point of view and nutritional perspective, according to a review of studies in different countries (*Food Science & Nutrition*, 2019), due in part to its significant vitamin A content. Compared with white and yellow fleshed varieties, orange fleshed sweet potatoes are a good source of dietary fiber, important in protecting against diabetes, as well as certain minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants (*Global Journal of Science Frontier Research: D Agriculture and Veterinary*, 2016). Evidence links sweet potatoes to anticancer activities due to phytochemical content (*Journal of Cancer Prevention*, 2017).

## The Finer Points.

Peak season for sweet potatoes is October through December, but they are available all year. Select small and medium sweet potatoes for a sweeter, moister flesh and those with smooth, firm, and blemish-free skin. The deeper the color of the skin, the richer it likely is in beta-carotene (or anthocyanins for purple varieties). Store in a cool, dark, well ventilated place, but do not refrigerate. Bake them whole and top with healthy yogurt, nuts, and a drizzle of maple syrup, mash with regular potatoes for fun flair, cut into fries and roast, or bake cooked flesh into your favorite pancake, muffin, and cookie recipes. **EN**

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*Sweet potatoes are more than just tasty!*



© CatLane | Getty Images

*Sweet potatoes are more than just tasty!*

—Lori Zanteson

## Notable Nutrients: Sweet Potatoes

1 medium (114 g), cooked, baked in skin

Calories: 103	Vitamin B6: 0.3 mg (16% DV)
Dietary Fiber: 4 g (15% DV)	Pantothenic Acid: 1 mg (10% DV)
Vitamin A: 21907 IU (438% DV)	Potassium: 541 mg (15% DV)
Vitamin C: 22 mg (37% DV)	Manganese: 0.6 mg (28% DV)

Note: g=gram, IU=International Units, mg=milligram, DV=Daily Value, based on 2,000 calories/day

## Sweet Potato Black Bean Bake

- 1 large sweet potato, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 15-oz can black beans rinsed, drained
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- ¼ c medium salsa
- ¼ c chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 clove garlic, minced



- 1 tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp allspice
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- Kosher salt (as desired, optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Spray a baking dish with non-stick cooking spray.
3. Place sweet potatoes, onions, bell peppers, and black beans in the dish and stir gently.
4. Mix salsa mixture into vegetable mixture.
5. Place in oven (uncovered) and bake for about 1 hour until vegetables are tender and golden brown.

Makes 4 servings

**Nutrition Information Per Serving:** 198 calories, 1 grams (g) fat, 0 g saturated fat, 38 g carbohydrate, 11 g protein, 12 g dietary fiber, 83 milligrams sodium, 4 g sugar

Recipe adapted courtesy Sharon Palmer, MSFS, RDN, *The Plant-Powered Dietitian*

## Research Roundup

- **Sugary Drinks Linked to Increased Cancer Risk.** Even small daily servings of sugar-filled beverages, including 100 percent fruit juices, may raise the risk of cancer, French researchers say. Using data from over 100,000 healthy adults over an average of 42 years, researchers found that 100 milliliters (about 3 ounces) of sugary drinks per day may be associated with a 22 percent increased risk of developing breast cancer and an 18 percent increased risk of developing any cancer. Artificially sweetened beverages did not increase cancer risk. The study suggests a link, not a cause between sugar and cancer. Further studies are needed.

(*British Medical Journal*, July 2019)

- **Even Small Calorie Cuts Benefit the Heart.** Reducing calories by as few as 300 per day—even in young, healthy weight individuals, seems to be very good for the heart, researchers say. Two groups of healthy young participants were studied over two years. One group of 71 people ate a normal, unrestricted diet, while the other group of 188 people restricted calories by an average of 12 percent, about 300 calories. The second group lost over 11 pounds of fat, reduced LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, increased HDL (“good”) cholesterol, lowered blood pressure, and became more sensitive to insulin, which may reduce risk of type 2 diabetes.

(*The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, July 2019)

- **Organic Apples May Be Healthier.** Going organic when it comes to apples may be better for the gut and the environment, Austrian researchers find. All apples, conventionally and organically grown, have bacteria—about 100 million bacteria in a typical apple—that colonize in our guts (most are in the flesh and the seeds, not the skin), but organic apples have a significantly more diverse, more distinct bacterial community than conventionally grown apples. Organic apples have specific groups that are known for their health-affecting potential. Improving microbial diversity improves outcomes.

(*Frontiers in Microbiology*, July 2019)

## In Coming Issues...

- **“Doctor” up your meals.** Reduce calories and fat while preserving flavor.
- **No time for a meal?** No excuses! Bring along a meal replacement bar instead!
- **Crazy for cranberries!** These little red berries are loaded with nutrition.